
The Camel Express



Newsletter of the Friends of Niger

Volume 22 Issue 2



July—August 2007

Young Girls' Scholarship Program Thanks FON & Finds a Home in PC Niger Gender & Development Program

I would like to thank you again for your continued support of our Young Girls Scholarship Program. I believe that by developing a fundraising partnership, not only are we helping these young girls who so greatly deserve our aid, but I hope that we are opening the door to a bright future for the Friends of Niger (FON) and the Peace Corps Niger Gender and Development (GAD) Program.

The projects of the GAD Program take into account both the differences and the inequalities between men and women in program planning, implementation, and assessment. The roles and activities of men and women affect who does what in carrying out an activity, and who benefits. Taking account of the inequalities and designing programs to reduce them contributes not only to more effective development programs but also to greater social equity. The Young Girls Scholarship Program is the largest project of our GAD program, but our small projects take many forms - youth groups, village tree nurseries, women's gardens, nutritional education, health camps, women's fairs, art clubs, and income generating activities such as soap making, sewing, fabric dying, and weaving skills trainings are just a few examples.

However, we are limited in the number and scope of projects that we are able to do since we are only able to raise so much money in a country as poor as Niger. It is our hope that we could strengthen the collaboration between Peace Corps Niger and FON and greatly benefit the people of Niger by simply setting up a section of the FON website dedicated to the Peace Corps Niger GAD Program. Those interested in Niger and the obstacles it faces, and how we here in Peace Corps Niger seek to address those obstacles through sustainable development practices would have unprecedented access to what life is like here on the ground and offer a unique opportunity to make a difference by donating to the Peace Corps Niger GAD Program. I truly hope you share this vision and I look forward to working with you all in the future.

Sincerely, Travis Massar, Peace Corps Niger Gender and Development Program Coordinator

PC Country Director Mary Abrams supplied the following background on the Young Girls Scholarship Program funding and why FON support is so crucial.

The current funds from FON to PC Niger that are destined for the Young Girls Scholarship Fund came as a grant to me as Country Director and the most needy project at the time was the Young Girl's Scholarship Fund. It had been funded since its inception by the Peace Corps Partnership Program, which allows Volunteers to post proposals for specific projects for tax deductible funding by individuals in the US. The Partnership program went through



Young Girls Scholarship Program
Participants at an Annual Conference.

some growing pains last year and one of the results was a discontinuation of funding for projects that last longer than the cycle of one Volunteer, including the multi-year Young Girl's Scholarship Fund. The reality on the ground and need for funding the girls already in our program and others who could benefit in future years has not changed with the change in the Partnership program. So when FON offered to send some money to me as a Country Director, we opted to put it towards this very deserving and needy program. Future monies would go from FON to the GAD board to the PCVs to the girls. The PC Niger scholarship program does not fund schools or school authorities, but directly supports the students. The new GAD coordinator is Travis Massar.

45th Anniversary of Peace Corps Niger



Dear Returned Peace Corps Volunteers of Niger,

The first group of Volunteers arrived in Niger on September 7, 1962. 45 years later, Peace Corps/Niger is proud to announce its 45th anniversary of collaboration and mutual friendship with Niger. To commemorate this landmark, we are putting together a series of activities that will culminate with a (a) *porte ouverte* at the Peace Corps bureau, (b) television show, and (c) special Swearing-In ceremony the week of 24-28 September, 2007. We are hopeful that Peace Corps Director Ronald Tschetter and a delegation from Washington will attend these events along with many dignitaries from both public and private sectors within Niger.

Ultimately, this celebration is about recognizing the work and impact that each current and returned Volunteer has accomplished during his/her time in Niger, and the partnerships and friendships fostered and endured over the years. In making this possible, we request your assistance. First of all, we are working on preparing a television program to air on ORTN (Office de Radiodiffusion Television du Niger -- <http://www.ortn-niger.com/>) on September 26, 2007. The program will be one hour long and include PC/Niger activities through the decades, panel discussion with locals who have been affected by Volunteers, and slideshows and video clips of Volunteers in action.

In addition to the television program, Peace Corps will have a *porte ouverte* the day of the show, to serve as a birthday celebration, with posters, media coverage and presentations. If there are returned Volunteers interested in coming back to Niger for this event, we would welcome this whole-heartedly. We are also considering other commemorative activities including a 45th anniversary *pagne*; hardbound 'photo books' that would include a selection of the best photos from RPCV submissions, arranged by decade; and t-shirts.

As a Goal 3 component to this celebration, we are interested in having an American media outlet document your work in Niger over the years. We would work through our Office of Communications and the Press Office in Washington, DC, but we also request assistance from you. If you have contacts with media outlets and would like to assist in setting this up, please let us know. Please send comments and thoughts to Christopher Burns (cburns@ne.peacecorps.gov). We look forward to hearing from you.

All the best,

Mary Abrams, Country Director, Peace Corps Niger

Renew your **Friends of Niger** membership for the year 2007 or join us for the first time. You'll find the **FON 2007 Membership & Order Form** on page 7.

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The Camel Express is the periodical newsletter of **Friends of Niger (FON)**.

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www.friendsofniger.org.

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Please send address changes and corrections,
as well as any queries to **The Camel
Express** at the address above.



Save the US Postal Service International Surface Mail Service (M-Bag) for Humanitarian Projects

Friends of Niger Board of Directors has joined with other groups and individuals to support an electronic petition signing to request the reinstatement of the US Postal Service M-Bag mailing overseas option that was recently discontinued. Individual members may also e-sign this petition. If you would be interested in learning more about this e-petition and signing the e-petition please see the message and internet link below.

On May 14 the US Postal Service eliminated International Surface Mail (M-Bag). This is the method many non-profits and individuals used to ship books, educational materials and other humanitarian items internationally. This method was used extensively by NPCA Affiliate Groups, RPCVs and friends/family of current PCVs in supporting grassroots efforts in many rural schools and communities in our countries of service.

USPS now offers Airmail service only, which in most cases has tripled (or even quadrupled) the cost of shipping items overseas. This has shut down many projects not only with RPCVs but other non-profits, church groups and school groups.

Several groups (Friends of Malawi, African Library Project, One World Children's Fund, among others) are working at compiling a list of non-profits and other groups who are protesting the elimination of International Surface Mail. This list will be sent to the Board of Governors of USPS as well as to Henry Waxman, the Chairman of the Oversight and Govt. Reform Committee which oversees USPS.

<http://www.petitiononline.com/zikomo/petition.html>

Women wait to be seen at the UNICEF-supported health centre in Madarounfa in Maradi, south Niger. Giuseppe Aquili/2007



Bilharzia: Waterborne Disease Blights Millions of Lives in Niger

Almost a quarter of Nigeriens suffer from bilharzia, an infection spread by swimming or bathing in water contaminated with urine and feces, according to new research by Niger's Ministry of Health.

Some three million of Niger's 13.4 million people have been diagnosed as suffering from the parasitic skin infection, also known as schistosomiasis. It causes rashes and flu-like symptoms, can create urinary problems and damage the bladder, liver, lungs, bowel and nervous system.

Parasitic diseases thrive in areas with poor water supply, sanitation and housing, according to the World Health Organization (WHO). And Niger, a vast and landlocked country on the southern fringe of the Sahara Desert, has the lowest number of wells and toilets per capita in the world.

Niger's government, in conjunction with the nongovernmental organization Schistosomiasis Control Initiative (SCI), has said it is responding to the data by constructing a new laboratory devoted to the disease in Niamey, and distributing drugs for treatment.

UNICEF REPORT FROM MARADI—April 2007

The health centre in the village of Madarounfa opened a month ago and serves 23 villages covering 39,000 people. There are no doctors in the centre, only two nurses and four medical staff. The health centre provides prenatal care, prevention of mother-to-child-transmission of HIV services, consultation for newborn babies, family planning and immunization. Around 70 per cent of all consultations are for children under the age of five. The centre is currently funded through patient fees. Adults are charged 900 CFA (equivalent to £1) and the consultation for children is half of this at 400 CFA. This explains why 1/3 of the population does not use this centre.

"In the health centre they tell us we should only breast-feed our babies because this will protect them from being ill" said Halima. Whilst most mothers breastfeed their babies, they believe that breast milk is not enough and so the custom is to give water too. Often the water offered is contaminated leading to diarrhea and dehydration. As I leave the health centre, I am convinced that education is crucial and that more women like Halima need to receive basic health information to prevent so many needless deaths.

**There is no way to peace.
Peace is the way.**

Niger's Ambassador to the United States graciously met with FON Board Member Penni St. Hilaire and Newsletter Editor Jude Andreasen. She provided this biography and looks forward to continued collaboration with Friends of Niger.

BIOGRAPHY OF MRS. AMINATA DJIBRILLA MAÏGA TOURÉ

Mrs. Aminata Djibrilla Maïga Touré was appointed to be the new Ambassador of Niger to the United States of America in 2005.

From 2003 until her appointment, she served as General Secretary of the National Francophony Commission at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. From 2002 to 2003, she held the position of Permanent Secretary of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Apart from four years spent as appointed Mayor of Niamey Commune II under the supervision of the Ministry of the Interior from 1996 to 2002, Mrs. Touré has served her entire career at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. From 1991 to 1995, she was Counselor at the Embassy of Embassy in Bonn, Germany.

Mrs. Touré began her career at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in 1979, after receiving a Bachelor's degree in Public Law from the University of Togo. She first served in the Legal and Consular Affairs Department until 1991. During this same period, she was able to continue her studies at the graduate level, from 1981-1984 in Paris, and from 1987-1988 in Cameroon.

Mrs. Aminata Djibrilla Maïga Touré was born in Niamey on November 4, 1955.

Update on Tin-Hinan

This report by Boston University students Mangu and Goro, a.k.a. Magali Carette and Sarah Garton, who visited, director of Tin-Hinan, a non-governmental organization supported in part by Friends of Niger.

For a week in March, we had the fantastic opportunity to live and learn with a Nigerien family in Niamey through a study abroad program with Boston University. Habsou Aboubacar, wife, mother and head of the family, is an incredible personality active in the Tuareg community working with social consciousness issues facing marginalized communities today in Niger. Habsou also runs the non-governmental organization Tin-Hinan Atelier, a women's working cooperative in the neighbourhood of Koura Kano. Two years ago on this lot, Tin-Hinan began working with a group of 21 women. The name, according to folktale, is that of the strong matriarch from which all Tuareg peoples originate. At this workshop, the women make all sorts of crafts for sale and by request: tie-dye, embroidery and sewing. The organization also provides the women an opportunity to learn how to read and write through daily lessons led by the group's managers. This means a lot in Niger where 84.7 percent of the women have never attended school, according to the 2005 World Bank report. While they work, the women are allowed to bring in and care for their small children. Habsou is an activist working with the United Nations with Indigenous Peoples' Rights, so Tin-Hinan serves women from all of Niger's various ethnic populations.

The atelier is in a building with one large workroom, where all the women work around a large table. It's a social atmosphere, where the women exchange ideas and work together on the same projects and also helping one another tend to the children around them. Along one wall is a large chalkboard for lessons. Tin-Hinan's founding members were eleven concerned Nigerien citizens: Habsou, doctors, judges and others. Their latest project is a women's micro-credit association in the village of Goroubi in the Tillabery Region, which has outside sources of funding. They are currently working with forty women and hope to double that number.

Tin-Hinan is one of a number of women's rights groups organizing in Niger, and there is still a lot of work to be done. It teaches skills, both business and academic, which women can use to start their own projects and enterprises. Tin-Hinan, a young organization, is full of ambitious projects that lack funding. Hopefully, with increased recognition, they will be able to find the funding necessary to continue to grow. To learn more about Tin-Hinan, contact Habsou at tinhinanniger@yahoo.fr or locally 96-88-42-04.



Galmi Hospital

Dear Family & Friends,

Nine months ago, Madame Souley was brought to Galmi Hospital. It took two people to carry her as she was too weak to walk. She had been having diarrhea for several weeks. It hurt to swallow because of the thrush in her mouth. We admitted her to the hospital and gave her the needed IV fluids and antibiotics. Our clinical suspicion of immunocompromise was confirmed with a positive HIV test.

She left the hospital a little stronger. During subsequent follow-up visits to our HIV clinic, we learned that her husband had left her because of her poor health and the loss of her beauty. He refused to contribute any money towards her medications or transportation to the hospital. She turned to her parents who took her in and cared for her. Following additional lab tests showing a severely weakened immune system, we started her on antiretroviral medications.

When I saw her in clinic today, I would not have recognized her as the woman we admitted to the hospital nine months ago. Her diarrhea has stopped and she has regained her appetite. When she stepped on the scale, she showed a healthy 12 kilogram increase in her weight. She looked beautiful as the feminine fat had returned to her face and torso. She had a look of hope that had replaced the despair. She continues to live with her parents, though she is now strong enough to take care of herself. Her husband has visited and asked if she would return to him now that she looks so good again. She said she is unwilling to go back to him until he comes for testing and treatment. Her 15 month old daughter was with her today. Together, we gave thanks for the restoration of health and that her daughter continues to show no sign of congenital transmission of the virus. With good management, Madame Souley can hope to live to see this daughter's children.

Thank you for supporting our efforts.

Christopher & Helene Zoolkoski, Galmi Hospital
NIGER, West Africa, May 2007



Tuareg Exhibition & Book

"Art of Being Tuareg: Sahara Nomads in a Modern World," with its accompanying catalogue, is the first major exhibition in the U.S. to examine the art and culture of the Tuareg, a semi-nomadic people of North Africa. Featuring the distinctive jewelry, clothing, leatherwork, and other highly decorated items for which the Tuareg are famous, the exhibition considers the complexities of history, desert living, and the ever-changing global market. This exhibition includes more than 200 Tuareg works from collections world-wide, documentary photographs, video footage, and music. The exhibition premiered at the UCLA Fowler Museum, Los Angeles, fall 2006. After Stanford, the exhibition goes on view at the Smithsonian's National Museum of African Art, October 10, 2007–January 27, 2008. The soft cover catalogue of the same title, "Art of Being Tuareg: Sahara Nomads in a Modern World," is available at the Smithsonian National Museum of African Art for \$45, and both soft and hard cover editions are available on Amazon.com.



TUAREG TALES IN TIMBUKTU - Volunteers Sought:

We would like to bring to your attention a new non-profit, 'Living Cultural Storybases' which will be working with Tuareg communities later this year. This community-empowerment work is a part of a global venture against the accelerating disappearance of cultural diversity being incubated in California, supported by the Christensen Fund. The retelling of traditional and personal stories is vital for cultural transmission, group solidarity, ethnic identity and evaluation of change. We would like your support to create living networks of stories and songs for minority communities to share, celebrate and re-interpret their cultural knowledge, i.e. self-empowering narratives. This can strengthen Tuareg dialogue across the generations, between scattered nomadic groups and with their urban diaspora in their own language, Tamasheq. We are looking for skilled volunteers who would like to get involved and sponsors for our 501c(3) organization. Do contact us! Email of our local CA contact: coordinator@storybases.org
Our website: <http://storybases.org>

Mercy Corps Nominated for 2007 Nobel Peace Prize RPCV Christie Collins is Director of Mercy Corps Niger

Excerpts from an interview with Director Christie Collins on Mercy Corps Web Site

Christy Collins first came to Niger in 1975 as a Peace Corps volunteer and began working on infant health programs in small rural clinics. After her Peace Corps service ended, she remained in Niger for an additional two years working for various organizations on projects that included agriculture, forestry and water. She returned to Niger in 1993 to work on a USAID food security program and stayed until 2000, before coming back for a third time in 2005 to spearhead Mercy Corps' health and therapeutic feeding program.

What are the biggest challenges facing Niger's people - specifically its poorest families - today?

Since some of Mercy Corps' health programs are in the capital city, Niamey, I'd like to evoke the migrant families from rural areas staying in Niamey as among the poorest and most vulnerable populations we work with (since they also come from the poorest families in the rural communities). These migrants likely feel little link to the urban community, and thus do not easily seek access to public services. I don't think that many of the kids of these families go to school. Nor do family members seek medical attention unless they are very ill, as services are not free and often cost well beyond what the poorest can pay. The plight of the migrant urban poor is the most dire.

What's the one best thing you think that Mercy Corps has done since arriving in Niger?

We have supported the integration of nutrition rehabilitation programs into the operations of 92 rural public health centers, and supported community volunteers to assist the government's health staff in undertaking this work. This has led to the admission of more than 40,000 at-risk and malnourished children since the program's inception in September 2005.

How can Americans best help the people of Niger?

Keep the populations of Niger in your minds and hearts, and be proactive in finding an area to support. Be aware of the position of your representatives and senators on issues related to Africa, the Sahel, and Niger in particular. Keep abreast of news of Niger and support fundraisers for Niger activities. Many American and international [organizations] are doing excellent work in Niger. There are also important program costs for which it is difficult to find donors: for example, the cost of [effective] treatment of malaria for children is very high. I would like to make an appeal directly for a supply of these malaria treatments for children, as malaria is one of the main threats to the life of a malnourished child. It is also one of the main causes of reaching a stage of malnutrition where the child's growth and life are compromised.

What's one thing that the world might not know about Niger that you'd like to share?

I would like the public to know that there are sharp, lean, agile and animated primary-schoolers skipping to class, holding hands; persistent mothers who walk 40 kilometers round-trip for a weekly dose of treatment rations for their children; dedicated mayors who meet their constituents at the market and hold open air briefings on the community's latest news; young men and women bursting to contribute and establish themselves.

To donate, see <http://www.mercycorps.org/silentdisasters/nigerhunger/1692>

Niger Is Getting Greener!

On July 2, National Public Radio (NPR) aired a good news story about Niger and trees. You can view it at the link below, under Wild Chronicles: Trees Return to Arid Niger. Researchers have found that in areas where there were no trees, farmers are now planting and protecting them. Aid groups from Europe and the United States planted trees extensively starting in the 1980s. The government of Niger also changed its policies and let local people take ownership of the trees. And that has encouraged farmers to let the trees grow. These days, they prune them for wood rather than chopping them down altogether. "They know the importance of trees," Larwanou says. "If there are no trees here, they are in trouble. That's end of their lives." The stories vary from one village to the next, but Tappan says the result is the same: Large swaths of Niger are getting greener.

<http://www.npr.org/news/specials/climate/video/>

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*Membership Dues & Contributions Help Fund **FON** Activities - including **The Camel Express**,
the **FON website**, the **FON Archives**, and **Projects** such as Those Listed Below.*

The Friends of Niger is a tax-exempt organization under section 501(c)(3).

Membership and contributions to Friends of Niger are fully tax deductible.

Please Check Appropriate Boxes

- ☐ Enclosed is \$20 for an Individual Membership in FON
☐ \$55 to cover Individual Membership in both FON & NPCA
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New and renewing members are entitled to one FREE copy of *Brother from Niger*

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FON Participation Menu

Indicate your interest with a check mark. Or add something new at the bottom. Tell us how to reach you on Page 11.

- ☐ Will help set up local FON group
- ☐ Would participate in local FON group
- ☐ Will be local FON contact person
- ☐ Would be FON contact person for potential PCVs to Niger (contact us at the address on page 7 or via e-mail at j.soloninka@sbcglobal.net)

Other _____

Inside THE CAMEL...

- Page 1 - Girls' Scholarship Program
- Page 2 - PCD's 45th Anniversary Plans
- Page 3 - News Bytes
- Page 4 - Nigerien Ambassador's Bio
- Page 4 - Tin-Hinan Update
- Page 5 - Galmi Hospital & Tuareg Book
- Page 6 - Mercy Corps
- Page 7 - Membership Form

An electronic version of this newsletter and previous editions can be accessed at <http://www.friendsofniger.org>



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Address Correction Requested